DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 791 EC 212 591

AUTHOR Palmateer, Robert
TITLE Educare: Evaluation of a Transition Program for Culturally Disadvantaged and Educationally Handicapped Youth. Executive Summary.
INSTITUTION Institutional Development and Economic Affairs Service, Inc. Nederland, CO.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 88
GRANT G008530282
NOTE 12p.; For final performance report, see EC 212 590.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; Bilingual Students; Computer Uses in Education; *Cultural Differences; *Daily Living Skills; Disabilities; Dropouts; *Educationally Disadvantaged; Ethnic Groups; Experiential Learning; Individual Development; Intervention; Limited English Speaking; Mentors; *Migrant Youth; Minority Groups; Outcomes of Education; Student Development; *Transitional Programs; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

This executive summary describes an evaluation study of a program which provided transition services to a culturally insulated group of dropout, migrant, bilingual youth of ethnic minority origin, a significant number of whom were adjudicated, handicapped, or limited English speaking. The project utilized experiential instructional techniques to promote the subjects' integration into "mainstream" culture by enhancing educational, personal, social, and economic measures of health. The students received training in General Education Development (GED) preparation along with training in four other program components: Foxfire, Rural Employability Development for Youth, Computer Practicum, and Peer-Mentorship. When transition program participants were administered measures of personal, social, economic, and educational "health," they were found to have significantly benefited from the transition model, compared with those receiving only standard GED instruction. The executive summary briefly reviews the study background, the research problem, research subjects and setting, methodology, findings, and summary conclusions. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305791

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Institutional Development and Economic Affairs Service, Inc.

IDEAS

EDUCARE:

EVALUATION OF A TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED AND EDUCATIONALLY HANDICAPPED YOUTH

Miner, D., Brennan, T., and Anderson, F.

Executive Summary
by
Robert Palmateer
Vice President, Program Development

1988

The research summarized herein was performed pursuant to Grant GOO8530282 from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Research and Services. The contents of this summary report do not necessarily represent official Department positions or policies and Department sanction should not be inferred.

Permission is granted to reproduce this document in full or in part providing the funding agency, sponsor agency, and authors are cited.

Magnolia Star Route
Nederland, Colorado 80466
(303) 443-8789

EC 212591

ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study conducted by Institutional Development and Economic Affairs Service, Inc. (IDEAS) examined the effectiveness of a four-component treatment model designed to assist out-of-school, migrant, bilingual youth of ethnic minority backgrounds (Hispanic, Russian, and Native American), of whom a significant percentage were also handicapped, adjudicated, and/or limited English speaking. The study consisted of a comparative assessment of student outcomes resulting from this model and its distinctive components, considered to be a system of transition into the mainstream culture, as contrasted with those outcomes realized from participation in a program of General Educational Development (GED) preparation only.

Relevant to enhanced personal, social, economic, and educational measures of subject "health," all categories of participants engaged in the transition program, when compared with those receiving only standard GED instruction, were found to have significantly benefitted from the transition model.

BACKGROUND

In its most fundamental sense, success for the school dropout may mean nothing more than being able to find a job. That possibility, unfortunately, becomes less likely with each passing year as the consequences of an increasingly competitive, technologically-oriented, dynamic work world converge to limit access for the unskilled and under-educated job-seeker. The decline in lower skilled, entry-level manufacturing positions has been well documented over the past decade; likewise, economists and labor statisticians report a surge in service sector employment opportunities. While jobs in this latter category may not always entail advanced academic competencies, acceptable computational, communication, and interpersonal social skills are often cited as prerequisites. Simply stated, today's economy can no longer absorb the number of labor force entrants lacking a high school education.

Recognition of these truths may serve as impetus for many dropouts' re-connection to formal education, as is evidenced by over six million who since 1971 have earned high school

equivalency certification through the GED program. Indeed, during 1986 one of seven high school diplomas resulted from this program.

While the GED affords dropouts a second chance for high school completion and represents a legitimate symbol of achievement, certification does not constitute a guarantee of employability or postsecondary success. In actuality, the holder of a GED certificate may find several doors closed and acceptance restricted to even such traditional placements as the armed services. Many employers perceive the regular high school diploma as representing a greater degree of student perseverance, academic competence, and social maturity, in spite of the fact that nearly one-third of today's high school graduates are not capable of achieving passing scores on GED examinations.

Clearly, the GED preparation process itself does little to dispel this attitude. Instruction frequently is characterized by isolation, with minimal opportunity for social interaction, and a disconnectedness between its basic skills curriculum and the more complex realities of occupational interest, readiness, and access. Program objectives for the most part are restricted to student attainment of passing scores on nationally standardized examinations in five basic content areas: mathematics, reading, written expression, social studies, and science.

Given the perception of failure attendant to dropping out--often held by the students themselves, as well as the broader community--attention has been directed towards enhancing this alternative by implementing retrieval programs which couple GED preparation with other instructional and employability development objectives. Many such initiatives represent an attempt by educators to assist dropouts to complete the transition from a world characterized by minimal opportunity and reliance upon subsidized subsistence, to one of social and economic independence, participation, and personal life satisfaction.

The effectiveness of these efforts merits examination in light of the number of out-of-school students enrolled in GED

programs (a total of 739,683 people attempted the GED examination battery in 1986 alone), the changing demands for preparation of a qualified work force, and the developmental needs evidenced by significant numbers of GED candidates. As the primary educational alternative available to dropouts, the GED draws from a pool of individuals whose school history often demonstrates characteristics restrictive of full participation in the community and its work places: the handicapped, limited English speaking, adjudicated, and ethnic minority.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

How best to evaluate a program which endeavors to serve as a means for economic, social, personal, and cultural change? As measured in this context and for the purposes of this study, a model defining transition as the process of personal, social, and economic change and assimilation into mainstream culture (Halpern, 1985) was adapted to include that process by which culturally isolated groups of people might be more readily prepared for participation in the dominant social and economic structure.

As characterized by Halpern and others, transition is a developmental process leading to a state of client "health" and is supported by three pillars consisting of:

- Personal Health: enhanced self-esteem and sense of personal worth;
- Socio-Relational Health: social/community integration within a broader social context than that previously evidenced; and,
- Socio-Economic Health: an ability to secure and maintain employment.

This operational definition of "health" can serve as an effective means for the design, implementation, and measurement of retrieval programs. Many studies have acknowledged the effectiveness of the GED program in developing basic skill competency in important basic content areas. However, the GED does not, in itself, address the spectrum of concerns noted

above. Restricted as they are currently to a focus upon basic skills instruction, GED programs can only foster the dropout's development in particular areas of socio-economic health. As noted by Halpern and evidenced by the results of this study, the absence of any one of the pillars fundamentally lessens the program's effectiveness, which may be contributory to the dropout's stagnation and continued failure. The program under study addresses transition through an educational design encompassing traditional GED basic skills instruction integrated with instruction geared toward enhancement of participant self-esteem, self-worth, community identity, self-identity, and work force participation.

An ideal evaluation of the effects of the program requires a longitudinal examination of participant outcomes. Unfortunately, the restricted nature of this study precluded long-term appraisal and necessitated measurement of change within a more immediate context with reference to subjects' perceptions of self-worth and self-identity, subjects' relationships to the general social order, subjects' achievement of economic independence through employment, and subjects' competency in basic skill areas.

Drawing from diverse scientific perspectives and utilizing features of distinct disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, delinquency, criminology, education, psychology, and cultural anthropology, this study endeavored to not only examine the effects of an educational program on retrieved dropouts, but also to contribute further understanding of the process, meaning, and reality of change, as experienced by those dropouts.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS AND SETTING

Research was conducted at the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) in Woodburn, Oregon. The area surrounding this retrieval program is the state's principal agricultural area and, therefore, attracts substantial numbers of dropout migrant and seasonal farmworkers of minority ethnicity. During the period in which the study was undertaken (September 1, 1985, through October 31, 1987), the HEP program served 160 students, all of

whom had discontinued their schooling at least six months prior to program enrollment. One hundred fourteen subjects participated in the study. The research population was 35 percent migrant and 65 percent seasonal farmworkers, as defined by United States Department of Education criteria.

Economic diversification and changing patterns of farmworker migration have resulted in a settling-out phenomena. Consequently, many field workers who were recently migratory now reside year-round within the tri-county catchment area of the program. Forced to rely primarily upon seasonal work opportunities, the population has increasingly turned to education as a means of securing permanent employment and economic security.

Nearly three-fourths of the state's Hispanic population (Oregon's largest minority group) reside within the HEP service area. The program's enrollment, however, since 1984 has reflected a nearly even balance between Hispanics and Russian Old Orthodox immigrants. Known locally as "Old Believers," this latter group is a culturally and religiously distinct population which continues to strictly adhere to the traditional values, customs, and practices of its Seventeenth Century Russian foundation. After various historical migrations, groups of these people in the mid-1960's began to arrive in Oregon, where they have since established insular, rural neighborhoods and continue to live primarily agrarian lifestyles. A recent trend has resulted in younger members adopting more urban lifestyles and employment.

Thirty-six percent of the research population was male, and 64 percent was female. The mean age of the dropout population was 19 years, 11 months. Twenty-nine percent were married, with 30 percent having one or more children. Sixty-one percent of these subjects were of Russian ancestry, 29 percent Hispanic, 6 percent were Native American, and nearly 4 percent were non-Russian Caucasian. Twenty percent were limited English speaking.

The mean grade of withdrawal prior to program enrollment was grade eight, with the range being from grade two to grade twelve.

The most commonly cited reason for leaving school remained the family's need of income. Nearly thirty percent of the study group had been retained at grade level while in school, and 26 percent were handicapped. Virtually all of the subjects or the subjects' families received some form of public assistance.

METHODOLOGY

An experimental design delineating three types of "treatment" and intersecting with two categories of students (six total study cells) was employed in this examination. Treatment was analyzed in terms of:

- minimal (under one hundred hours) or no instruction in either GED or transition;
- GED services only (one hundred or more hours with no transition instruction); and,
- GED and transition instruction totaling over one hundred hours.

Outcome benefits for students who had been engaged in these three levels of instruction were examined, additionally, with reference to the students' special education status (handicapped or non-handicapped), according to federal and State of Oregon criteria.

Students receiving minimal (under one hundred hours) or no instruction constituted the control group. The remaining two treatment groups comprised the experimental aspect of the study.

Four components of the educational treatment (transition) model were examined, as was GED instruction, in terms of contribution to participant benefit. These components consisted of the following:

- a community-based, experiential learning model adapted from the nationally recognized Foxfire concept and involving cultural journalism techniques (interviewing, photography, writing, and production);
- a computer practicum of "hands-on" instruction;

- a didactic, vocationally related program of occupational readiness; and,
- a peer mentorship pairing of students with previous program enrollees.

Subjects' involvement in each component was analyzed by hours of participation, providing a sensitive measure of treatment exposure by component, by combinations of components, and by total relative participation in the treatment model. This procedure also allowed for specific predictions from each program component to particular scales within the dependent measure.

In addition to collecting information on special education eligibility and degree of participation, demographic data (age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, etc.) was maintained for each subject. Lastly, the major instrument utilized in the study was administered to each subject. For those with limited English proficiency, a translated version was supplied. This instrument was comprised of a number of scales, most of which have known scale characteristics (reliability). In all cases where a scale was employed in analysis (either as a dependent measure or independent variable), reliability was computed. Covariates (age, marital status, number of children, and history of work while in school) were selected relevant to the degree to which they reflected the existence of a "social/community maturity" construct in this population.

FINDINGS

Findings resulting from this study confirmed the value of the GED program in addressing several academic and developmental needs. Significantly, however, the research also validated increased benefits derived by subjects when this program of basic skills was coupled with one focusing upon transition services. The inclusion of transition components led to enhanced student outcomes in the following areas:

- self-esteem;
- sense of emotionally "belonging;"

- personal competence;
- value of independence;
- personal identity;
- sense of social integration and sharing of norms with the larger community/society;
- sense of personal competence within a social context;
- work-related skills; and,
- economic success or potential for success.

It is clear that the transition components have far more influence on creating a positive outcome than does GED study alone. Subjects involved in the transition program reported a feeling of enhanced influence with regards to their school, acknowledged greater reward of both an academic and non-academic nature, felt liked by their instructors, and demonstrated a strong sense of attachment to their school environment.

Additionally, the model under study was determined to serve as an effective tool for successful personal, social, economic, and cultural transition for culturally isolated, dropout, migrant, and limited English proficient youth. Handicapped and non-handicapped, adjudicated and non-adjudicated subjects benefitted nearly equally, as determined by outcome variables. All treatment groups evidenced greater benefit than their counterparts and peers who received GED services only. In some instances, handicapped youth (especially those not completing GED certification by the conclusion of the study period) appeared to derive greater benefit than those who were non-handicapped as a result of their participation in the transition components.

Relevant to the contribution of individual transition components included in the HEP program's service delivery scheme, the discriminant analysis of the socio-economic outcome variable indicates that the experientially-based, Foxfire adaptation resulted in the greatest enrollee benefit, followed by the job-readiness component (REDY), the computer practicum, and the peer mentorship activity, in that order of significance. Analysis of

the specific scales reflected on the pre/post instrument indicates REDY, followed by the adapted Foxfire offering, as the most significantly beneficial transition components.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

Manifest in the school dropout issue is a costly personal and societal loss, national in scope and magnitude. One in four of the country's young people do not graduate from high school. Among many high-risk groups--the handicapped, the ethnic minority, the migrant, and the poor, to cite a few--and amid particular areas of the nation, the problem is of even greater proportion. For many students, dropping out of school has become the norm and expected outcome of American education.

Programs of retrieval represent not only a second chance for dropouts to gain the skills demanded for meaningful participation in the nation's work force, they constitute a major weapon in the country's attack upon such social ills as illiteracy, crime, drug addiction, poverty, and unemployment. As such, they warrant an examination and commitment to improvement comparable to that devoted to preparatory, pre-collegiate curricula and programs.

In this respect, the study undertaken here endeavored to examine an educational retrieval program within the context of change: the potential to assist dropout, unskilled, economically disadvantaged youth to make the transition from a dependent, subsidized life to one of individual autonomy, purpose, and socio-economic participation.

While the findings of this study, in their sum total, may be specific to the subjects, their needs, and the restrictive social, personal, and local circumstance embodied within the scope of the program examined, these results, nevertheless, provide additional and important insight into the meaning and substance of transition for dropout youth.

Further analysis of the program's lasting effectiveness in achieving long-term personal, social, and economic change would be desirable and would yield a more definitive understanding of that change. However, the analysis undertaken in this study

points clearly to important benefits derived by dropout youths' enrollment in comprehensive retrieval programs aimed not only at GED study, but transition services as well.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bhola, H.S. Needed research in adult literacy for policymakers and planners. Adult Education. 1981, 31, 169-176.

Halpern, A.S. Transition: A look at the foundations. Exceptional Children. 1985, 51(6), 479-486.

Halpern, A.S. and Benz, M.R. A statewide examination of secondary special education for students with mild disability: Implications for the high school curriculum. Exceptional Children. 1987, 54(2), 122-129.

National Center for Education Information, NCEI Reports. February 8, 1988, 4.

Nell, M. and Charulus, M. A survey: Perceptions of the College of Lake County's GED program as seen by former students and area personnel managers. College of Lake County, Grayslake, IL, 1977 (ERIC Document Retrieval Service No. ED 161 471).

Pawasarat, J. and Quinn, L. The GED as a measure for employment. Milwaukee: UW-ETI, 1986, University of Wisconsin Employment and Training Institute.

Whitney, D.R., Malizio, A.G., and Patience, W.M. The reliability and validity of the GED tests. (GED Research Brief, No. 6), 1985, Washington, D.C., American Council on Education.

Willett, Lynn H. Longitudinal comparison of GED and high school graduates' postsecondary educational success. Adult Literacy and Basic Education. Winter, 1982, 218-225.